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    ~ Holiday Viruses Not Bad~ Apple Slashes Prices! ~ "Free" Web Fading?
    ~ CompuServe New Service ~ Want To Test X-Box?!   ~ New NatFrame Out!
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->From the Editor's Keyboard   "Saying it like it is!"
  """"""""""""""""""""""""""""

Happy New Year, officially! It was a quiet celebration here on the
home front. My "ringing in the new year" has mellowed over the years. These
days, I'm lucky if I'm awake to toast the television when the clock strikes
midnight! A couple of drinks and we're all set!

What's going on at Microsoft lately?! I mean, I'm not a big fan of
Microsoft for a number of reasons, but this is getting ridiculous! First
their antitrust problems, then the suit by their temp workers, and now a
discrimination lawsuit. I almost feel bad for the company. But, if these
allegations are true, I hope they pay through the nose!

Last weekend, we got buried in snow here in New England. We were pretty
lucky around here, only a few inches. But in other parts of the area, at
least a foot of snow fell. And cold! It appears that the weather is
starting to get seasonally normal; we've been fairly lucky the past few
years.

Not much going on. The news is starting to pick up now that the holidays
are behind us. The winter CES show is this weekend, so we should hear about
some interesting new products for the coming year. And things will continue
to brew as we get into the year, I'm sure.

So, since it's a short week due to the holiday, I think I'll be brief this
week. This is the first issue going into our third year of publication;
it's hard to believe! All of us here at A-ONE are looking forward to a
great year - I hope you'll be here with us to enjoy it!

Until next time...

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          New Version of NatFrame, Its Designer, and a New Theme!

Hi!

Just wanted to say that Nature have released a new version of the window
replacement for Magic 6.x, NatFrame. The new version is v1.0b, and is
available at our site nature.atari.org. There you will also find a
designer program, so you can compose your own themes, which has been
requested by many. Finally there's also a new theme for you to enjoy.
Note that NatFrame also works on MagicPC, and should work on MagicMac,
though it hasn't been verified.

Regards

Henrik (Hencox) and Torbjvrn (InSTream) /Nature

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
jmirando@portone.com

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. I hope that all went well with your New
Year celebrations. Mine was the same as it usually is... A quiet
evening at home, watching movies and waiting to welcome the new year. I
also upheld tradition and performed my little "ritual" as I have for a
couple of decades now.

It's fairly simple... A simple little silent prayer for the coming year
and for all that's passed so far. I have no grand delusions about it
being important to anyone other than myself, but I find that it does
help to put things in perspective for me.

We've gone through less than a week of the new year, and already we've
seen interest rates change, the stock market go a little bonkers, and
yet another chance for peace in the middle east. What highs and lows do
the other 51 weeks hold for us, I wonder.

Well, enough of this touchy-feely stuff. Let's get to the news, hints,
tips, and info available on the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup
====================================

Ken Kosut asks for help with his Falcon:

"I went into my falcon today and replaced the stock 80 meg IDE
with a Toshiba 2 gig IDE.
The hard drive installation went very well.
But I made one mistake. I cleaned and lubricated the keys.
I have done this before on an ST4 with no problems.

But on the falcon it is quite a different story.
a lot of the keys are not working. I press and get nothing.

Is it possible to replace the keyboard assembly with an STf keyboard?
Looks like the same case.
Of course the action will not be the same.

It was very interesting to see the inside of a falcon.
After I got it all together, it still would not boot up properly.
I solved the problem after many trials and errors.
I think but am not absolutely sure that my HDDriver.sys file got
corrupted.

After repartitioning and reinstalling the driver, everything seems to work just fine. Except that now I can't type anything.

I would appreciate any suggestions on the keyboard."

Xlaes Holmerup tells Ken:

"In fact, it's exactly the same keyboard - but with a different color, so you can use an STf keyboard without any problems."

Keeper of the Flame, TJ Andrews, asks about graphics viewing:

"Photochrome 4 does a superlative job of displaying GIF files on my Mega STE (as long as I remember to slow down to 8MHz). Is there a program somewhere that does an equivalent job with .JPG files? Or, failing that, is there a JPG->GIF converter? I've tried viewing JPGs with CAB 2.7, and it just doesn't measure up."

Bob King tells TJ:

"No-one's mentioned Graftool, it doesn't convert JPG to GIF but has a superb set of filters, the enhance focus and/or sharpness are the best out and the scrolling is very smooth and also has a catalogue feature. As to CAB 2.7/2.8, it may be a bit slow, but it has the ability to display many more variations of JPG than any of the other programs mentioned."

Neil Roughley tells Bob:

"GrafTool certainly does convert JPG to GIF. Right-click the image and select 'Konvert'; choose '256 Farben' (or less) and then call up the re-mapping options dialog ('Methoden'). Set the dithering ('Rasterung') and palette options and click 'OK'. Floyd-Steinberg dithering along with Octree or Median-Cut variations work the best.

Or you can simply use the 'Datei' dropdown menu and 'Sichern als' (Save as) GIF, which will use default, configurable re-mapping options.

If I remember correctly, the unregistered version of GrafTool will allow only one GIF conversion per session. Also, some of the program's features will depend on your graphics mode."

Bob replies to Neil:

"As usual I talk crap, but only half crap, problem here was, I work in true color and of course JPGs usually have more colours than the 256 that as far as I know GIF is limited to. Result is that clicking on 'save as' in true color just gives TIf, PCX and PNG as possible. Yes as you say, map down to 256 or operate in 256 colours and JPG to GIF is possible with Graftool."

Peter Schneider adds:

"What about 'Zeigsmir' (show it to me)? [It's] Shareware."

Peter West finishes the thought:

"[It's] called Look'n See in English and it will show most graphics files with the appropriate modules, as well as ASCII and binary files.

I have it as my default viewer for all files, though for JPEG and TIF I use the Apex viewers as they automatically switch to hi-colour even if you are working in mono or 16-colour rez. L'n S dithers to the current screen depth, like most other viewers (Imagecopy etc) do, but you are offered a wide variety of algorithms which it is worth while experimenting with. Of course, the dithering takes time..."

Martin Byttebier tells Peter:

"Another useful thing is that I can convert ASCII-txt to ps. It's also very useful to strip out html tags from webpages. Furthermore it convert Un*x man pages to ASCII., etc...
It's the most versatile tool for our platform I know."

James Haslam posts this interesting retrospective:

"Goodbye to the 20th Century, it's been an interesting 100 years. From the Wright Brother's first powered flight, to the International Space Station of today. From the millions of people killed in wars, including the First and Second World Wars to more recent killing fields of the Balkans. From the discovery of antibiotics to the decoding of the human genome.

Goodbye and good riddance to much of it. Let's hope the coming century will be more peaceful and cleaner, sometime soon oil will run out, and hopefully the world will become less polluted. Hopefully mankind will realise that our time on this Earth could be short indeed and if we wish to survive as a species we should start working towards colonising the solar system.

Yes, because there was no year Zero, January the 1st 2001 is the actual start of the 21st Century!"

Dolan Morrison asks:

"Is it possible to connect a VGA or SVGA monitor to the Atari STE. I believe there is a cable available for this."

'Steve' tells Dolan:

"I maybe wrong here, but don't TUS sell such an adaptor? I used to use a greyscale vga on my original STe years ago - it only worked in highres mode, not because it was mono but something to do with the different frequencies that low/med res outputs. So you'll still need a TV/rgb monitor for these two resolutions."

Lyndon Amsdon tells Steve:

"They did, but I fear they're now no longer."

Dave Escott tells Lyndon:

"Incorrect.

I'm still here. Just trading under a different name these days."

Edward Baiz adds:

"I believe Mario Becroft has such a device, but I think it will only allow you to use it in the mono mode."

Ian Millar asks about surfing the net with an ST:

"I'm coming back to the ST after a few years, I want to use it amongst other things for sending e-mail, newsgroups etc, can anyone tell me what software to use nowadays, and where to get it."

Malcom Dew-Jones tells Ian:

"I often use Uniterm and a dial-in connection to my local freenet."

Greg Goodwin tells Ian:

"The all in one product is called "Newsie" and it is available at pretty much any Atari ftp site. (May I suggest 193.190.204.128, or chapelie.rma.ac.be if you prefer). You will require a copy of STing (sting.atari.org) to handle the TCP/IP stack. If you have a color AES (like NAES), Erik Hall's Mymail is my favorite emailer (http://www2.tripnet.se/~erikhall/programs/mymail.html)."

Dan Ackerman adds:

"Hey you are forgetting STiK2, which if he had a STiK setup before, he can just drop the new program in the auto folder and remove the old .ACC and should have a working setup. Not necessarily fine tuned, but should be drop in place replacement if the old setup worked still."

Greg Goodwin takes his turn asking a question:

"When the US CAB 2.5 to 2.7 upgrades originally came out, I held off because 2.8 had just been announced, and I figured that 2.8 upgrades would be coming out shortly. Obviously, that was a poor decision, and I find myself wondering how the English speaking 2.8 users obtained their copy. So, how did you?

What exactly was improved in 2.8 over 2.7 again? I'm afraid I've forgotten."

John Garone tells Greg:

"I got CAB 2.8 directly from Oliver at ASH. I tried in the US first but no good! There is an English RSC from ASH also."

Martin Byttebier adds:

"There is also fixes for MiNT users. Cab 2.80 works very good now with freeMiNT 1.15., at least on my Hades.

The new jpeg module can handle progressive jpg much better. Such jpg are loaded much faster but it seems this is only the case with MiNT-users.

Some Magic users has reported that they didn't notice a speed different between 2.70 and 2.80.

Some figures done on a Hades running freeMiNT 1.15.10b/N_AES 2.0.0, 256 color mode Test: reading offline a test page containing 13 midsized prog. jpg's (35-65 kb) and two small gif's.

1) Cab 2.70e: load time: 1'46"31

```
2) Cab 2.80:          0'49"75
3) Wensuite 3.30c:    0'17"82
4) Adamas 1.72 pl3:   1'24"86
```

Note on Adamas. None of the 13 jpg's were displayed correct. In fact
one could barely see what the picture was.

As you see there is a big different between 2.70 and 2.80 but be aware
that this applies to progressive jpg's. If the page contains only
normal jpg's and/or gif's one will not notice a speed difference. And
as said already it seems that Magic users doesn't see any difference.
Why I don't know. Maybe a bug inside MagiC?"

Well folks, that's it for this week. Tune in again next time around,
same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying
when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - XBox At CES!! Want To Test XBox?
   """"""""""""""""""""""""""""""   Ducati World Racing Challenge!
                                    Vanishing Point! Logitech & VM Labs!
                                    And more!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News   - The Latest Gaming News!
   """""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""

              Microsoft to Demonstrate Xbox Gaming System

Software giant Microsoft will unveil the first demonstration of its new
Xbox video-game console's technology on Saturday at a Las Vegas electronics
conference, the Wall Street Journal reported in its online edition on
Friday.

The company's founder and chairman, Bill Gates, would demonstrate the first
mock-up of the system, due out next fall, at the Consumer Electronic Show,
the paper said.

Microsoft also would formally announce the arrival of satellite-based
interactive-television service Ultimate TV, the paper said.

The Ultimate TV devices, which are being offered in conjunction with
DirecTV, were scheduled to be ready before Christmas but were now expected
to be shipped on a limited basis this month and for wide availability in
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February, the paper said.

Microsoft has said the Xbox will be the most powerful console on the market, with an Intel Corp processor, a hard drive and a built-in modem for high-speed Internet access.


### Microsoft Recruiting Testers For Xbox Games


Wanted: Test subjects 13 and older. No experience necessary. Salary: Zip. Benefits: Be the first kid on your block to experience Microsoft's Xbox game console.

Microsoft is offering the equivalent of a dream job for adolescents by recruiting players to test games for its upcoming Xbox. The company has set up a Web site for anyone wishing to sign up for its Playtest Research program.

Those chosen for the program will play demo versions of games for the Xbox and PCs in a lab at Microsoft's headquarters in Redmond, Wash. Testers must be 13 or older and live in the Seattle area. Testers won't be paid, but the site promises they'll get "free stuff."

Microsoft plans to release the Xbox late this year in an attempt to expand its computing dominance to home entertainment. The software giant is expected to show a prototype of the console at this week's Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas.

Schelley Olhava, gaming analyst for market researcher IDC, said it makes sense for Microsoft to begin gathering opinions on the Xbox as soon as possible, especially because the device represents a new market for the company.

"Microsoft has been very careful to do its homework for the Xbox," she said. "It doesn't surprise me the development team wants to start testing these as soon as they can."

A Microsoft representative said that company executives will not comment on the testing program.


### Acclaim's Ducati World Racing Challenge for the Sega Dreamcast and PlayStation game Console Rolls Into Stores


Acclaim Entertainment announced that Ducati World Racing Challenge for the Sega Dreamcast and the PlayStation game console will be in nationwide retail outlets on Tuesday, January 2, 2001. Developed by Attention To Detail (ATD), the game is focused on the bikes, lifestyle and great tradition of Ducati, the world's premium motorcycle brand.

''This game offers a great racing experience for the both the casual arcade-style racing fan and the serious bike enthusiast," said Evan Stein, Brand Director at Acclaim Entertainment. ''It's got great physics, and the attention to detail in terms of handling and styling is remarkable. If you know something about the rich history of Ducati motorcycles, you'll recognize some of the real classic bikes here, and they're great fun to

race on. If you're new to Ducati motorcycles, then get ready for romance, because you're going to fall in love with them."

Ducati World Racing Challenge was developed by Attention To Detail (ATD) in close collaboration with Ducati. Part of the challenge in creating the game was bringing the full world of the Ducati experience to life. To meet it, the developer decided to create two games in one: Ducati Quick Race and Ducati Life. In the Quick Race mode, single players earn better bikes as they progress through the eight initial tracks. There are three levels of difficulty.

Ducati Life mode offers the single player realistic simulations of the entire range of Ducati bikes, and a taste of some harsh realities. Players prove their racing skill and are rewarded with cash that can be used to enter more races and to upgrade to better bikes. Players tune their bikes up until they are at peak performance level, then risk it all by entering a challenge race against another player. The winner takes home both bikes, while the loser ends up sobbing in an empty garage. Ducati World Racing Challenge also lets players purchase their bikes from either a Classic Showroom featuring Ducati bikes from the 50s to today, or from the Ducati Showroom (offering modern bikes), or from the Used Showroom, where bikers on a budget can still lay claim to an affordable Ducati.

''Both Acclaim and ATD worked hard with Ducati to ensure that the gameplay and styling accurately projects the revolutionary and desirable Ducati feel," said James Sewell, Assistant Product Manager at Acclaim Entertainment. ''Designed with both the average gamer and die-hard Ducati enthusiast in mind, the sophisticated game physics allow the player to get a feel for the different handling characteristics of Ducati's bikes throughout the classic Italian motorcycle company's fifty-year-old history."

Ducati World Racing Challenge is rated E for Everyone by the ESRB.


Acclaim's Vanishing Point for the Sega
Dreamcast Zooms Into Stores


Acclaim Entertainment announced that Vanishing Point for the Sega Dreamcast will be in nationwide retail outlets on Wednesday, January 3rd.

Developed by Clockworks Games, Ltd., the game takes advantage of an advanced physics engine to emulate the characteristics of over 30 licensed vehicles.

''Vanishing Point is a unique racer," said Evan Stein, Brand Director at Acclaim Entertainment. ''The physics have been very realistically modeled, so you aren't just going to jump into an Aston Martin and expect it to respond like a Volkswagen Beetle. Each vehicle takes practice to master, and for those who relish this sort of in-depth challenge, there's a ton of replay and gameplay value in Vanishing Point. It also has the first-ever stunt modes featuring licensed cars. Bottom line: Vanishing Point delivers."

Vanishing Point was developed by Clockwork Games, Ltd. The game features eight tracks each of single player and two player racing modes, a Stunt Driver mode that puts any driver's skills to the test, and a league-style multiplayer mode for up to eight people. While racing for the best time,

gamers will face an extensive real-time traffic system with highly
competitive opponent AI. For maximum flexibility and control, players can
adjust each vehicle in the Tune Up Shop. Remarkably, Clockworks' advanced
engine means that there is no scenery pop up and no fogging; players can
see all the way to the Vanishing Point

Vanishing Point is the first title from Acclaim to make use of their
proprietary Netspine brand technology. By using the modem on the
Dreamcast, players from around the world can compete for top scores and
participate in online tournaments. Acclaim will progressively enhance
game-play, interactivity, and web integration in future titles with
additional online features made available by NetSpine brand technology.

Vanishing Point is rated E for Everyone by the ESRB.


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->A-ONE Gaming Online        -        Online Users Growl & Purr!
  """""""""""""""""""""


             Logitech Announces Partnership With VM Labs


Logitech announced plans to develop products based on NUON Broadband and
DVD technology from VM Labs.

The initial product, a Logitech gamepad for NUON, is expected to be
launched in the first quarter of this year. The company will have more
specific product information and other announcements available at the VM
Labs booth (No. N223) at CES, January 6-9.

``We are continuing to move our products 'beyond the PC' and into the
living room," said Ted Hoff, vice president and general manager of
Logitech's Interactive Entertainment Division. ``Our partnership with VM
Labs gives us the opportunity to add additional functionality, in the form
of a high-quality peripheral, to any entertainment device that incorporates
NUON technology."

For Logitech, NUON provides an opportunity to expand the company's customer
base into mainstream game products, going beyond an audience of hardcore
gamers currently playing games on dedicated consoles and PCs. VM Labs is
currently teaming with a number of hardware and software partners to
deliver cutting edge interactive home entertainment. Motorola is launching
NUON-enhanced Streamaster set-top boxes that will deliver the first
broadband gaming. Toshiba and Samsung have both released NUON enhanced DVD
players offering consumers a wide variety of new movie viewing features, as
well as the ability to play games and display visual light shows while
listening to music CDs.

Previously, ``Ballistic" software came packed in with the Samsung DVD
N2000 player and ``The Next Tetris" game is part of the Toshiba SD2300 DVD
player package. Initial NUON software titles began shipping in December,
2000. Numerous additional titles from Hasbro Interactive, Taito Corp.,
Sunsoft and others are expected to become available throughout 2001.

``NUON technology is embedded inside digital video entertainment
products," said Paul Culberg, executive vice president, VM Labs. ``Putting
this kind of power into DVD players and set-top boxes creates new
opportunities for interactive media experiences. Logitech's leadership in
peripherals and game devices makes them an ideal company to develop
accessories for NUON enhanced systems."


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                    A-ONE's Headline News
                The Latest in Computer Technology News
                   Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson



             Apple Cuts Prices on Cube, G4 and PowerBook


As rebates on many items end for the holiday season, Apple has slashed
retail prices today on selected models anywhere from US$300 on the Power
Mac G4 400MHz model to over $1000 on a 500MHz G4 Server. The prices were
released online through the Apple Store and selected major catalog
retailers, MacCentral has learned.

The move comes as Apple is vigorously trying to clear out remaining stock
of products that caused the company to suffer a glut of inventory as big as
11 weeks worth in early December. Industry watchers are estimating Apple is
still sitting on some seven to eight weeks worth of inventory, although
certain models such as consumer iMac and iBooks could be well below the
average five weeks Apple normally stocks.

The new prices on selected items are (old price listed first followed by
the new price):

| Product | Old Price | New Price |
|---|---|---|
| 450MHz G4 Cube | $1799 | $1499 |
| 400MHz G4 Tower | $1599 | $1299 |
| 450MHz G4 Tower | $2499 | $1999 |
| 500MHz G4 Tower w/DVD-ROM | $3199 | $2399 |
| 500MHz G4 Tower w/DVD-RAM | $3499 | $2499 |
| 400MHz PowerBook | $2499 | $1999 |
| 500MHz PowerBook | $2999 | $2199 |
| 500MHz G4 Server | $4199 | $3099 |

MacCentral has learned catalog dealers were informed of the price cuts
early last week to prepare for online and print price changes. Many, but
not all, independent dealers were made aware of the changes late last week.

Many dealers questioned about the price changes are speculating that
because selected G4 tower, G4 server, and PowerBook systems dominate the
price decreases, Apple must be preparing to release new models of the three
computer families next week at Macworld Expo in San Francisco.

In addition, speculation is that the low-end Cube price cut is due to a

continuing high inventory of that particular product. Consequently, other models that were not reduced in price are thought to be low in inventory and therefore Apple does not need to cut their manufacturers suggested retail price (MSRP).

# Apple to Strut New Stuff, But Is That Enough?

Apple Computer Inc. is expected to unveil faster notebooks and a slick new operating system at the year's biggest Macintosh trade show next week, but it faces an undercurrent of doubt that it can thrive without big change.

Bloated inventory, a falling stock price and recent products which failed to really sizzle raised the question; can Apple stay the course on its own?

''Maybe. Well, the short answer is no," said Daniel Kunstler, an analyst at J.P. Morgan H&Q. He hastened to add that Apple did not need to buy or be bought so much as to find an alternative to focusing on making commodity-like personal computers.

''Just riding the PC market cycle is not anybody's idea of a good time," he said, pointing to competitors who have branched out into Internet appliances and high-end enterprise computers.

Apple often uses the San Francisco Macworld exposition, which opens this year on January 9, as a stage to launch products and strategy.

Chief Executive Steve Jobs raised the stakes in December, when he forecast Apple's first quarterly loss in three years -- and the first since his return to the firm. It was the second quarterly warning in a row by Jobs, who blamed economic weakness and Apple ''miss(ing) the boat" on some marketing strategies.

''A lot of people are waiting to see what they come up with next, and that is the new operating system," OS X, said John Burke, vice president of marketing programs at Renton, Wash.-based Apple dealer MacZone. Apple declines to say if it will introduce anything at the show.

Apple failed to impress with the last product round, said Stephen Baker, an analyst at PC Data, noting Apple's unit sales in the first three weeks of December were 40 percent below a year ago, versus a 25-30 percent decline for PC rivals.

''They didn't do a lot with the iMac other than change the colors," he said of the low-end line, ''and the Cube has been disappointing in terms of price value," he added of the stylish desktop that has not sold as well as expected.

''Even the people intensely loyal to Apple want to get value for what they spend," especially as PC makers slash prices.

Price cuts on Jan. 1 on high end systems -- more than 25 percent on high-end notebooks -- extended the impact of previous rebates which were made to clear out a sales channel clogged by consumer holiday computer disdain.

''The most logical announcements are Powerbooks, because it has been over a year since they have dramatically enhanced the Powerbook, and PowerMacs,"

by offering microprocessors with higher clock speeds, said David Bailey, an analyst at investment bank Gerard Klauer Mattison & Co.

Beyond the new products, some investors would like to see more new ideas about where the company is going.

Kunstler said Apple had done a mediocre job of touting its media capabilities, although in new television advertisements actor Jeff Goldblum pushes Apple home movie software.

''We are pessimistic," said an analyst who requested to remain anonymous at a fund with a significant Apple holding. Of course, ''they have plenty of company when it turns to figuring out what the next move should be."

Apple has become more of a staid value stock rather than a rocketing model of technology innovation.

Andy Neff, an analyst at Bear Stearns who is neutral on Apple, said the cheap valuation helped spur takeover rumors, such as a recent one that Sony Corp.(6758.T) would buy Apple.

Sony Chief Executive Nobuyuki Idei has said the electronics giant has no such plan and financial analysts like Neff say it is unlikely, given Sony's commitment to the Windows-Intel platform.

''Apple is in no risk of going away," he said, pointing to its loyal fans. ''It is a question of what will make them thrive and prosper."


At Long Last Linux 2.4 Has Arrived


Linus Torvalds and the army of programmers who collectively developed the Linux kernel deliver the final release of the long-awaited 2.4 code.

The much-anticipated next version of the core of the Linux operating system is ready at last.

Linux creator Linus Torvalds and the army of programmers who collectively develop the Linux kernel delivered the final release of the long-awaited 2.4 code Thursday. The code is now available for download.

A prerelease version of the kernel was made available to testers on Dec. 31.

The 2.4 kernel contains several improvements. For desktop use, the most notable improvement is support for the multitude of printers, digital cameras, scanners, keyboards, mice, network cards, modems, Zip drives and other devices that plug into the universal serial bus port.

For server use, the most significant changes are improvements that will let Linux take better advantage of systems with multiple processors--a key feature for spreading Linux into more powerful servers.

Linux 2.4 is running about a year behind schedule.

Torvalds said in June 1999 that Linux 2.4 would be done by last fall. In May 2000, Torvalds acknowledged that 2.4 was likely not to see the light of day until October 2000, since developers were attempting to cram more

new, high-end features into the final release. On Oct. 6, at LinuxWorld in
Frankfurt, Germany, Torvalds was quoted as saying Linux 2.4 wouldn't be
launched until December at the earliest.

Linux distributors have been counting on including the 2.4 kernel in
versions of their products starting in the first half of this year.

Red Hat has been planning to make the 2.4 kernel the heart of its next
release, code-named Florence, due out in the first quarter. Caldera
Systems Inc. has been planning to upgrade to the 2.4 kernel for both its
eDesktop and eServer Linux releases in the second quarter.

Linux is a clone of the Unix operating system. It competes with Unix
variants such as Sun Microsystem's Solaris and with Microsoft's Windows
operating system. Unlike those commercial packages, it can be obtained for
free and can be freely modified.

Linux burst onto the scene in 1999, when big computer makers adopted it
into their product lines. That popularity led to wild successes on the
stock market for a few publicly traded Linux companies, enthusiasm that
has since waned.


## 107th Congress To Tackle Internet Issues


Last year's 106th U.S. Congress and its sub-committees debated a number of
Internet-related issues, but the upcoming 107th Congress, which convenes
on January 3rd, 2001, is certain to continue addressing at least two of
the most highly contentious questions: Internet taxation and privacy.

Adding to the impact of the U.S. Federal Communications Commission's
expected approval of the massive America Online-Time Warner merger, next
year's legislative rulings will potentially affect Internet businesses,
consumers and even governments worldwide.

The Internet Tax Freedom Act, supported by President Clinton, has been
fiercely debated in both the House of Representatives and Senate. Leading
those in favor of anti-tax legislation is Representative Christopher Cox
(R) of the 47th district in Orange County, California.

According to The Washington Post, a three-year federal ban on state
taxation of Internet transactions expires in October, and legislators must
vote on whether to extend the ban or make it permanent.

"It's not difficult to understand why so many people are in support of
this reasoned approach to taxation of the Internet," said Cox in testimony
to the Telecommunications, Trade and Consumer Protection subcommittee of
the House Commerce committee in 1997.

"The Internet is growing very rapidly," Cox said. "It is growing so
rapidly that it cannot be reliably measured. The commercial potential is
extraordinary."

In a bipartisan effort to limit the ability of state and local governments
to impose unnecessary and burdensome taxes on the Internet, proponents of
the ban say the Internet should be declared a tax-free zone.

But opponents of the moratorium claim that the Internet should be taxed in

the same way as cable TV and phone services, and that states should be self-regulating in that regard. Senator Ron Wyden (D-Oregon) gave some examples of the effects of Internet taxation during a debate last year.

"Tennessee recently imposed five years of back taxes on a home-based Internet service provider, putting the small business into bankruptcy. Minnesota has notified vendors who have no physical presence in that state that they have to pay a sales tax in Minnesota because they advertise through a catalog on the Web. Texas is levying a tax on home pages," said Wyden.

Another potential imbroglio involves privacy, a highly contested issue in the real world as well. One of the related issues Congress will have to decide is how much individual information should be kept private.

Although President Clinton passed a bill earlier this month prohibiting access to personal medical records, savvy Web users can still retrieve information using only a person's social security number.

Government, credit and legal files accessible from the Web abound with information on personal backgrounds, including military, legal and financial records, and many Web sites offer investigative services. Efforts to control disclosure of information on the Internet are not likely to end anytime soon.

"The Internet is new. It's something none of us have previously experienced," said Senator Byron Dorgan (D-North Dakota). It will create, in my judgment, a new venue of commerce, the dimensions of which none of us probably, at this point, know. And the questions it will pose, as a result of the myriad state and local tax laws... we may not ever be able to anticipate."


Holiday Computer Viruses Infect And Annoy, But Few Destroy


Viruses that sought to take advantage of the Christmas spirit left Internet users relatively unscathed this season, more peeved than harmed, according to a software security experts.

McAfee.com Inc., a major provider of anti-virus software, said it has tracked about a 1,000 instances of computers being infected by holiday-themed viruses in the last month and a half.

Most of the reported holiday-themed viruses are so-called worms, which try to spread themselves quickly through e-mail but tend to cause less damage. There have been few reports of destructive viruses, according to Ian Hameroff, a manager at Computer Associates International Inc..

But users should still be wary of e-mails from unknown addresses carrying suspect files, and delete them immediately rather than opening them, he said.

''Even worms can be modified to become destructive," Hameroff said.

One destructive holiday virus was Kriz, which activates if a user turns on his computer on December 25th, Christmas Day, and erases all of the files on the hard drive.

A variant of the Chernobyl, or CIH, virus which devastated computers in 1997, Kriz can lie dormant year after year if the user doesn't turn his PC on on Christmas Day. All of the major anti-virus software makers have developed protection against Kriz.

Most of the reported holiday viruses were more like the Navidad worm. Reportedly originating in Latin America, Navidad sends itself to users via e-mail which, after users click on a link in the text of the message, says ''Feliz Navidad," Merry Christmas in Spanish.

Navidad sends itself to e-mail addresses listed in the user's Microsoft Outlook address book, an operation that can cause computer programs to slow and possibly crash. Reports of Navidad peaked in November but fizzled out by Christmas.

Another worm, variously called Music or Santa, played the song ''We Wish You A Merry Christmas" on computer speakers as well as spreading itself via Microsoft Outlook.

One just-emerged worm is Tqll-A, which arrives in users' e-mail box as a mail called ''Happy New Year." Users can activate the worm if they click on the attachment "happynewyear.txt," which replicates itself by e-mail and also downloads a file called ''Teen.exe" onto the user's computer.

Computer Associates' officials said they have had no reports of Tqll-A infection yet.

Despite their facade of holiday cheer at this time of year, experts said worm programs can be destructive in effect, if not intent.

The most infamous worm is the Love Bug, which affected nearly 45 million people on a single day in May, causing so much e-mail to be sent that Internet mail servers crashed and traffic worldwide slowed down.

Total damages from lost sales and productivity were estimated at about $7 billion, according to Computer Associates.


Teen Hacker 'Coolio' Pleads Guilty


A teen-age hacker who was briefly linked to a highly publicized series of hacking attacks against major companies pleaded guilty Tuesday to three misdemeanors.

Dennis Moran, 18, who went by the name of ''Coolio," broke into rsa.com, operated by Internet security company RSA Security Inc., and dare.com, an anti-drug site connected to the Los Angeles Police Department.

If a judge approves a plea agreement, Moran will serve nine months to a year in jail and pay $5,000 in restitution to each of three victims.

Wearing a hooded sweat shirt and jeans, Moran said little during the half-hour hearing in Carroll County Superior Court and declined to talk to reporters afterward.

''I feel the disposition is fair for the crimes I committed," he told

Judge James O'Neill.

Prosecutor Michael Delaney disclosed that Moran also got onto the Web sites of four military bases, three Army, one Air Force. Getting onto the sites potentially gave him access to classified information, but he never actually accessed anything classified, Delaney said.

Moran, who lives with his father in Wolfeboro, will be formally sentenced this spring after a pre-sentencing investigation. He pleaded guilty to unauthorized access to computer systems.

He will remain free on bail until his sentencing. He may use computers provided he does not do anything illegal with them.

The break-in onto the DARE site occurred at about the same time as publicized disruptions of major sites such as Yahoo! and eBay. Moran had allegedly bragged about those attacks but later said he had only been joking. A Canadian teen-ager who uses the computer name ''mafiaboy" was later charged with disrupting eBay and Yahoo!

When he was first identified, Moran spoke freely to reporters. He was depicted as a polite, intelligent teen who dropped out of high school because he was bored and read Tolstoy after investigators confiscated the family's computers. He soon changed his mind about interviewers and has remained silent since.

He went onto the DARE site twice a year ago, defacing it with pro-drug slogans and images, including one depicting Donald Duck with a hypodermic syringe in his arm.

The Web site of RSA - which proclaims itself ''the most trusted name in e-security" - was linked to another hacked computer at a university in South America. There, a nearly duplicate hoax site proclaimed: ''Trust us with your data! Praise Allah!"

The hacker left a message, ''owned by coolio," and derided RSA's earlier announcement that it had developed a countermeasure to the types of attacks that had been launched against eBay.


Microsoft Employees File $5 Billion Racism Suit


Microsoft was hit with one of the largest discrimination suits in U.S. history on Wednesday as seven African Americans alleged racism and a "plantation mentality" at their workplace.

A group comprising both current and former employees in the company's Washington, D.C., and Redmond, Wash., offices sued Microsoft for $5 billion, alleging that they were repeatedly passed over for promotions, paid less than white employees, and subjected to harassment and retaliation when they complained.

Willie Gary, the Florida lawyer handling the case, said he is seeking class-action status.

''They (Microsoft) have a plantation mentality when it comes to treating African American workers," Gary said.

Gary pointed to 1999 government statistics that showed only 2.6 percent of Microsoft's 21,429 employees, and only 1.6 percent of the company's 5,155 managers, were black.

Deborah Willingham, Microsoft's head of human resources, declined to comment on the litigation but said in a statement that the company takes allegations of discrimination seriously.

''Microsoft has a zero tolerance policy toward discrimination in the workplace," Willingham said.

Willingham said the company has increased its percentage of minority workers in recent years but attracting minority high-tech workers continued to pose a challenge.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, black Americans make up 11 percent of the work force as a whole but only 6.3 percent of all computer and data processing employees, the category which includes computer software.

The case is scheduled to be heard in U.S. District Court in Washington by Thomas Penfield Jackson, the judge who ordered Microsoft to be split into two parts last spring after finding the company violated antitrust law. That decision is currently being appealed.

Plaintiffs' lawyers said they expected Penfield to decide on the case's class-action status within 60 days. They said they expected the case to be brought to trial within a year.

Gary said the $5 billion figure was intended both to reimburse the plaintiffs and to punish the world's largest software company.

''In a real sense, $5 billion is not that significant to these folks. You have to hit them in their pockets," he said.

While the amount of damages sought may have no bearing on the actual outcome of the case, several other U.S. companies have recently paid record amounts to settle discrimination suits. In November, Atlanta-based Coca-Cola Co. settled a discrimination case for a record $192.5 million, while Texaco Inc. paid $176.1 million in 1997 to settle a discrimination suit brought by its employees.

Former Microsoft account executive Rahn Jackson, whose original discrimination suit was joined by the six other plaintiffs, said he was repeatedly passed over for promotions and paid less in salary and stock options than his fellow workers, despite good performance reviews and 17 years of experience in the high-tech industry. When he brought his complaints to Microsoft CEO Steve Ballmer, Ballmer said he could not help him, Jackson said.

''That's pretty strange if he was CEO and there was nothing he could do," Jackson said.


Intel Unveils Faster Celeron Chip for Cheaper PCs


Intel unveiled on Wednesday its fastest microprocessor yet for low-cost personal computers and has also started selling a lower-cost version of its

new Pentium 4 chip.

Costing $170 in lots of 1,000, the 800 Megahertz Celeron chip is aimed at PCs typically priced below $1,000, Intel said.

The Santa Clara, Calif.-based company also has developed a new chipset -- which surrounds the microprocessor -- that has a faster bus, the pipe through which data passes between the microprocessor and other parts of the chipset.

The faster bus runs at 100 MHz, compared with 66 MHz currently, Intel said.

To help spur demand for the Pentium 4, Intel is now selling a Pentium 4 chip that runs at 1.3 Gigahertz and is designed for systems typically costing $1,500 and higher, compared to the $2,000 range for PCs that use the 1.4 GHz and 1.5 GHz Pentium 4 processors.

The 1.3 GHz Pentium 4 will cost $409 in lots of 1,000.

Systems using the lower-cost Pentium 4 will be shown at the Consumer Electronics Show being held this week in Las Vegas.


### Iomega Ships Bus-powered Zip Drive


Iomega Corp. announced the availability of a new Zip drive that draws its power off the USB interface rather than relying on an external power supply. Iomega hopes the bus-powered removable storage drive will better appeal to laptop computer users and users looking for simplified connectivity.

Iomega's new drive uses the Zip format -- a removable storage medium that can accommodate up to 250MB of data on a single disk. The drive sports an ultra-thin design, and weighs in at about nine ounces.

The unit is similar to other recent Zip offerings -- it's fully compatible with both 250MB and older 100MB Zip disks. The drive will include one Iomega U250 disk, a 250MB premium design Zip disk that's being offered in a new U shape and a polypropylene carrying case that Iomega describes as "virtually indestructible."

Iomega says that the new drive is compatible with USB-equipped computers running various flavors of Windows and Unix, as well as Mac OS 8.1 or above.

The Zip 250MB USB Powered Drive is available from Iomega and retailers for a suggested retail price of US$179.95. The drive is expected to be available in Europe, Asia Pacific and Latin America markets by the end of the first quarter.


### CompuServe Launches New Version of Service


CompuServe, America Online Inc.'s unit targeting value-oriented consumers, said it will launch the latest version of its online service on Thursday with improved e-mail and instant messaging features.

The new version, called CompuServe 2000 Version 6.0, will let users sort their e-mail by date and have an automatic address completion feature. It will also support HTML, which will let users send graphically enhanced mail or documents.

''The other thing for our customer base is that we improved our toolbar. It's easier to navigate," said Joel Davidson, senior vice president of market development and operations at CompuServe.

Other improvements include a built-in media player that gives members access to multimedia options to access audio and video off the Web.

It has also improved its shopping area, offering a shopping assistant that provides information such as buyers' ratings of a site's reliability and adding a variety of merchants.

In the value Internet access market, often characterized by users who get the service in conjunction with rebates, CompuServe competes with Microsoft Corp.'s MSN and Prodigy Communications Corp.

''What we are trying to get to is to make it very easy to use and cater to that value person. The features used most often are IM (instant messaging) and e-mail," Davidson said. ''We aren't putting a lot of focus on broadband and anywhere applications because our consumer is not there. They don't have as much money to spend and are not as tech savvy so there isn't a lot of focus there. That's where AOL goes," he added.

He added that CompuServe's target audience is growing because as more people get online and buy personal computers, they are looking for rebates.

''This is a pretty significant improvement in the product. We continue to sign up new members -- a million and half under this rebate program started a year and half ago. As time goes on, we will see the value space become larger."


## Will Web Follow Yahoo's Charge?


Is the Web's free ride nearly over? Now that Yahoo is charging auction fees, analysts say other free services could follow suit.

With "make money" the new Web mantra, industry analysts say companies will soon start charging for services they once offered for free.

The first likely candidate is auctions, with many portals expected to follow Yahoo's lead. Beginning Jan. 10, the Web giant will start charging listing fees of 20 cents to $2.25 per item.

"There used to be the time that companies wouldn't charge and steal users from others that did," said Kirstin Hoefer, director of content applications at broadband provider Excite@Home. "Companies can't do that anymore."

It's not that companies want to start charging for services such as online payments and classified listings. In fact, Jupiter Research analyst Andrew Ari Clibanoff said Yahoo is probably going to lose some customers to free auction sites.

But shrinking advertising dollars means companies are going to have to come up with other ways to make money or shut their virtual doors for good.

Yahoo's prominence on the Web could be just the signal companies need, Clibanoff said.

"I see Yahoo's decision to jump off the advertising boat and go with a revenue model (as) - an argument for others to do it," he said.

Yahoo wasn't the first to start charging for a service that it once offered for free. Months ago, Sports Web site Asimba.com decided to start charging users who wanted its once-free personalized workout service.

But which free services will likely carry price tags?

Will consumers pay for content?

Content, for one, said Jupiter Research's Clibanoff, although he said there are no indications that pure content sites plan to start charging.

"Paid content is something Jupiter is paying a lot of attention to," he said. "We're exploring a lot of the opportunities to monetize those deliveries. But at this time, there are no visible investments that we endorse right now."

Free Internet access could be another victim of the retrenchment, Clibanoff said.

They include pure plays like NetZero, which announced it's going to start charging some of its users who surf more than a certain number of hours a month. Market conditions have already shuttered other free-Internet-access companies.

And portals that offer free Web access to entice customers may soon convert from a hosted buffet to a no-host bar, analysts said.

Consumer-to-consumer sites, like half.com, may also add a fee, Clibanoff said.

Excite@Home's Hoefer said sites listing classified advertisements for free may add a price tag to that service as well. Why not? Consumers already pay for newspaper advertising.

"It would be a natural," she said.

But there are still some services that Web companies will shy away from attaching dollar signs to, such as free email, instant messaging or chat.

"They are already kind of blended into the fabric of the Web," he said. "To pull it out of that and isolate a user service makes it not do-able."


IRS Offering Paperless E-Filing


Truly paperless electronic tax filing will be available for most taxpayers this year from the Internal Revenue Service, which projected Tuesday that a

record 42 million will choose the e-file option.

People who want to zap their returns to the IRS will select their own five-digit personal identification number instead of mailing in a separate paper signature form, which had hindered more rapid growth of e-filing, IRS Commissioner Charles Rossotti said. About 35 million returns were e-filed in 2000, including some with PINs chosen for taxpayers by the IRS.

''People made fun of us - 'You've got electronic filing but then you've got to file a piece of paper.' It didn't make a lot of sense," Rossotti said. ''This really makes electronic filing paperless."

To confirm the taxpayer's identity, the IRS also wants e-filers to include the adjusted gross income and tax amounts from last year's return. A proposed $10 credit to offset any electronic filing fees failed to pass Congress, but Rossotti says benefits of e-filing include faster refunds, greater accuracy and specific confirmation that the return was received.

In addition, the IRS is adding 23 forms to the list that can be filed electronically, meaning almost every individual taxpayer can now use the e-file system.

''It's going to help growth because it gets us into taxpayers that haven't been able to do it before," said Terry Lutes, acting IRS electronic tax director.

The new electronic filing system is one of many changes effective for this tax filing season, which ends this year at midnight April 16. The traditional deadline, April 15, falls on a Sunday.

About 40 million IRS tax packages and 17 million tax-related postcards will begin showing up in America's mailboxes in the coming weeks. People who e-filed last year will get information on how the new PIN system works.

Other changes effective for this filing season:

-A new checkbox on the 1040 form authorizing the IRS to discuss any problems directly with a paid preparer. The IRS says this will reduce the ''correspondence burden" on taxpayers, but it won't authorize the preparer to represent the taxpayer in an audit or collection matter. More than half of the expected 130 million returns will be done by paid preparers.

-The definition of a foster child for the $500 child tax credit or earned income tax credit now requires that the child be a relative or placed in the home by an authorized placement agency. The child also must have lived in the home for the entire year.

-Taxpayers whose only capital gains or losses are distributions from mutual funds can report gains on line 10 of the 1040A form, rather than filling out the longer capital gains forms.

-Up to $2,000 in student loan interest is deductible, up from $1,500 in 1999. But the deduction isn't available for married couples filing jointly with incomes above $75,000, $55,000 for singles.

Beyond changes in the law, the IRS continues to try to improve its levels of service. Rossotti said telephone service - only about half of all calls got through last year - would be ''noticeably better." He declined to give any figures.

``Over the next two or three years, we hope to get it up to a commercial level, which would be 85 to 90 percent. We won't be there this year," Rossotti said.

Free walk-in tax assistance also is available at 400 IRS offices nationwide. Some of them will be open on Saturdays between Jan. 27 and April 14.

Rossotti also predicted the IRS would begin to reverse steep declines in such enforcement actions as audits, which dropped to record lows as the agency struggled to implement a host of new taxpayer rights required by Congress in a 1998 reform law.

``We will, I think, improve in those areas in 2001," he said. ``Instead of going down it will be leveled off and slightly go up."


### DotComGuy Emerges From Confinement


DotComGuy, who legally changed his name to reflect his online life, has emerged from his Dallas town house after a year of self-confinement.

His plans include changing his name back to Mitch Maddox. The computer systems manager also intends to wed Crystalyn Anne Holubeck, whom he met in a chatroom on DotComGuy's Web site, Dallas television station KDFW reported. No date has been set.

DotComGuy, who never ventured past his tiny backyard for a year, bought all his necessities online. His daily life was recorded by 20 cameras that broadcast to the world at http://www.DotComGuy.com.

DotComGuy said Monday he was bored at times, but that the year passed quickly as he answered e-mails and questions from reporters.

Corporate sponsors hoped DotComGuy's stunt - and his dependence on the Internet - would encourage others to use cyberspace for transactions normally reserved for the storefront.

He moved into the then-empty house on Jan. 1, 2000.

As the clock struck midnight Sunday, DotComGuy said goodbye to Web viewers, walked outside and drove away on a small motorized scooter.


### Electronics Show Set To Lure Newbies to Net


Internet companies, software manufacturers and personal computer manufacturers plan to target an entirely different potential Internet audience at the massive consumer electronics show set to open Friday in Las Vegas, Nevada, according to analysts: non-computer users.

The show, which will feature product introductions from such industry powerhouses as Microsoft, Sony and Intel, will mark the debut of Internet products geared toward helping those companies increase the number -- and monopolize the attention -- of Net surfers. More than 100,000 people are expected to attend.

"What's happened as the personal computer audience has grown is that the big companies are looking to combine products with Internet connectivity," Namvin Sabharwal, director of residence and networking technologies at Allied Business Intelligence, told NewsFactor.

For example, Sony will introduce its new satellite radio XM, and the first wireless modem for its Clie handheld Internet unit. Microsoft plans to show its upcoming Xbox game console and Ultimate TV, which unites satellite television, WebTV and digital video recording.

Intel's MP3 player, announced Tuesday, will make its first appearance. The company will also feature its Web-capable tablet, while Sony plans to show its own version, called the VAIO Pen Tablet, according to industry reports.

Microsoft chairman Bill Gates, AOL Interactive Services president Barry Schuler, and Intel president and CEO Craig Barrett will be keynote speakers on the future of the Internet and prospective business solutions. U.S. Federal Communications Commissioner Michael Powell is scheduled to discuss issues ranging from digital television to broadband access.

The question that arises out of a gathering of so many computer and Internet kingpins is what impact the show will have on the future direction of the Internet. The availability of new products will almost certainly encourage more computer use and more Internet surfing, but the question of how non-computer users can be attracted to the Internet has become paramount for future technology development.

The answer may lie in one of the main themes of the show -- making Internet connectivity and access available everywhere.

"This is certainly the year of the digital consumer, whether you are rewinding live TV or listening to digital music as you stroll through the park," claims the convention's Web site. "Consumers are connected everywhere, anytime and it's only getting better... and easier to use."

The omnipresence of the Internet has become obvious, and with the introduction of new products permitting Internet access without the complications of a personal computer, analysts predict an even more user-friendly Net experience.

"Internet appliances are a big thing right now, and it has become the focus for the Internet," said Sabarharwal. "It's all about adding Internet connectivity to appliances, cars and anything in the home."

Consumer electronic companies are, in effect, strategizing for and marketing to a different, less technology-oriented audience, and are striving to make the Internet as much a reality as the brick-and-mortar world.

"There's really no innovation in regular consumer electronics, like TV, but there is much more of an audience for the Internet," said Sabharval. "It has become the focus for the big Internet companies like Microsoft, Compaq and Dell. It's reapplying Internet technology to consumer electronics."

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